

Minutes of the Blackburn Rovers Fans' Forum Meeting Tuesday 18th July 2023 – 6.30pm

Present – Fans' Forum

John Wareing

Kenny Hodgkinson
Savio Mathias
Peter Bolton
Mark Hitchen
Mike Graham
Alan Birkbeck
Annette Birkbeck
Ray Williamson
Neil Duckworth
Bharat Parmar
Roseanne Silverton
Megan Longworth
Terry Crawford

Present from BRFC

Steve Waggott

Mike Cheston
Christina Haines
Lynsey Talbot
Fraser Read

Attending on Zoom

Steve Birtwell
Jennifer Lewis

1. Apologies for Absence

Tristan Stock
Mushtaq Khan

2. Matters Arising from the Minutes of the Previous Meeting 13th March 2023

• Disability Issues

LT reported that resumption of the club's planned disability working group, Part of the Crowd, had been delayed until after an NRAC audit had been completed on 17th August to allow for finding to be discussed with the group. A likely date would now be in September.

3. Daily Mirror Article

MG asked for a comment from the club on the recent article in the Daily Mirror which suggested financial issues for the club's owners and a concern that Jon Dahl Thomasson wanted to leave the club.

SW responded that the club did not comment on media speculation as it would be a never ending task.

The article did contain an element of truth in respect to an adjustment to our normal budgetary situation. The VHPL Group had been put under some Government restrictions with regards to their overseas investments which they are obviously endeavouring to resolve as soon as possible.

This has, in turn, put pressure on the club's budget since the end of last season but the Owners had still allowed the club to bring in three new players at the start of this transfer window to replace key players who had recently left the club.

Going forward the club will be looking at cost savings wherever possible across the club with any further signings being carefully managed as cost control is required on all expenditure levels to ensure that the club remains compliant within FFP / Profit and Sustainability rules.

Jon Dahl Thomasson had been kept informed of the situation and whilst he wanted to keep progressing the quality of the squad he understood the current situation. He obviously had two years remaining on his contract with us.

In response to a question from MH, SW stated that whilst the situation was not ideal for the Owners and the Club the executive and senior management staff are continuing to work diligently to ensure the club's meets all its obligations as they always had done.

4. 2023/24 Season Tickets

FR reported that current sales of season tickets were 8,227. This figure was ahead of previous years although sales had started earlier this year. This had generated £2.2m to date. The club had a target of selling 10,000 season tickets in all, to include half season ticket and other promotional package sales.

There was concern about the high prices at some away grounds this season, where prices could be up to £45 for away fans.

5. 1875 Club

KH asked about the discount packages available with 1875 Club membership. SW replied that he was planning to offer discounts such that 1875 membership would be recouped very quickly at the start of the

season.

ND asked whether the club was specifically targeting walk-on fans for 1875s Club membership. SW agreed although it was difficult to get those walk-on fans who bought tickets right before kick-off.

6. 2023-24 Replica Kit Supplies & Sponsorship

FR asked for some feedback on the new 2023/24 home shirt and ideas for future kits from 2024/25 – whilst the plan for 2024/25 was ahead of the planned critical path for earlier delivery there was still time to influence designs.

MG asked whether home shirts could be quartered rather than halved, as a lot of fans feel this is more traditional. JW stated that he and many fans would like to see all Rovers kits having quartered shirts so that it would be a unique identifier for anyone watching Rovers games.

The 1,000 home kits made available for the first sale had sold in 6 hours. There would also be 1,000 shirts available for the first sale of second and third kits on Thursday 20th and 27th respectively. The club fully expected a further delivery of home kits before the first home game with West Brom.

MH asked whether shirts could be bought for under-18 fans without the Totally Wicked logo on. FR and SW agreed that that should be possible.

7. We Are The Rovers - Memorandum of Understanding

PB reported that the Blackburn Rovers Supporters Trust had been renamed as “We Are The Rovers”. There had been a lot of work done recently with the club and with reference to the planned Government White Paper and a Memorandum of Understanding had been agreed and would be formally signed at the Girona game. Hopefully this will lead to a permanent consultation group with the eventual aim of setting up a Shadow Board over a period of time.

MG asked where the club saw the role of the Fans Forum in this new structure. SW replied that he saw the consultation group and the Fans Forum operating in tandem, with the Forum being essential to provide feedback on the overall fan experience and the consultation group handling more strategic matters. JW agreed to consult Forum members on how this change could be successfully introduced.

The Trust was sponsoring the Girona game and providing the pre-game entertainment. They had also raised around £1,000 to provide tickets for those not normally able to afford then for the game.

Separately the Trust had successfully renewed the asset of Community Value status for Ewood Park for a further 5 years.

8. Team Matters

SW stated that the club had a number of contract extensions to be agreed with players.

SM asked what could be done about improving the quality of refereeing in the Championship. SW replied that he had attended a meeting with club representatives and referees recently. David Webb was now in charge of the referees' body and gave a detailed presentation. The quality / consistency of refereeing was a constant theme at club meetings.

9. Engaging Fans in Outlying Areas / Standing in the Blackburn End

Following the plans at the last meeting to set up a working group to look at engaging fans in areas outlying to Blackburn, it was agreed that Forum members needed to do some work in identifying relevant names and locations so that trials could be set up. LT agreed to pass on the contacts that she was aware of as a starting point.

A similar working group to look at issues around standing in the Blackburn End would need volunteers to work with the club and the local council to make progress.

10. Tony Parkes

MG asked whether any progress had been made on finding somewhere to properly celebrate Tony Parkes' long association with the club. Some fans had suggested naming the Riverside Stand after Tony, but SW stated this would require further consideration. He did put forward an alternative but in any event any suggestion would need to be approved by Tony's family.

11. Stadium Cleanliness

SM asked whether there was a plan to clean up the exterior of the stands at Ewood. LT replied that the club had a regular contract to do this ahead of regular games. In fact the priority in recent weeks had been on internal work at the stadium although now the first home game was imminent some of this work will be done. In reality safety was the most important aspect as the club needed to ensure that all relevant safety regulations were constantly adhered to.

SW outlined some of the recent work that had been done in recent years

on the ground and the costs associated. For example the rusted girders had been repaired / painted at a cost of £100,000 and the work on pitches across the Academy, the Senior Training Centre and Ewood had cost around £500,000 in total that included a fully stitched pitch at Ewood Park.

MH suggested that it might be worth having a presentation at a future meeting about all the work that had been done and was planned.

12. Museum Project

MG asked for a progress report on the plans for a Rovers Museum. MC replied that an application for funding to the Heritage Lottery Fund had been prepared but would not be submitted until decisions had been made on other possible work and therefore available locations. Work on archiving and memorabilia was proceeding well.

13. Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

LT had met with Megan Longworth from Her Game Too earlier that day and had meetings planned with the South Asian Supporters on Wednesday and Proud Rovers on Thursday.

The club had regularly celebrated International Women's Day in recent years and now planned to similarly celebrate the new International Men's Day in November, which will focus predominantly on mens' mental health.

In response to questions SW agreed to provide some costings information regarding the Ewood Express.

14. Any Other Business

- SW reported that work on the Indoor Centre was proceeding well – a new surface had been laid and he expected a re-opening by the end of August and it being fully completed by the end of this year. Value of all this work is £565k covered by £250k from the Football Foundation; £50k from the Council and remainder from the Community Trust.

15. Dates of Next Meetings

11/9/23

13/11/23

Members should contact John Wareing at johnwareing52@gmail.com or 07984 085474 to give their apologies if they cannot attend a meeting.

Any fan who wishes to see an item on the agenda should contact John at least a week in advance of the meeting by email or phone as above.

